

A "Praxis" Model Of Public Administration

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THE term 'praxis' is given two meanings—both relating to practice: (1) exercise or practice of an art, science or skill. (2) customary practice or conduct. Both meanings suggest emphasis on practical skill and conduct. Thus a praxis model of public administration might be the one that underscores the practical skill and conduct of those involved in public administration—it is argued here (a) the public (the people or their representatives duly authorized); and (b) administration (bureaucrats, rules, procedures, acting together by their skill and conduct to get things done. The practical skill relates to programmes in various segments of social life which the people and the bureaucrats jointly undertake, execute and evaluate (administer) and conduct relates to accepting joint responsibility for programmes launched. For nothing is so practical as the programmes which indicate the actual types of work a government does, and nothing is so indicative of conduct as accepting responsibility for programmes. Thus, programmes may be viewed as the warp and woof of public administration anywhere. A major assumption of this paper is that public administration is meaningless without programmes and programmes are meaningless without the public. These two crucial terms—programmes and the public—must then be defined first.

The term programme has many meanings. The meaning in which it is used here suggests "a plan or system under which action may be taken toward a goal". In other words, programmes in this work would mean and refer to plans of action. But not all plans of actions. Only those plans of action that a government undertakes to implement through its public administration. At this point, public administration must be defined or explained to establish the relation between programmes and public administration.

Like programme, the term 'public' has many meanings. One basic meaning of the term public is the people—of, relating to, or affecting all the people.—It is argued here that this is the most significant meaning of term public—though it may have other people-related meanings. When we use the term 'public administration' public is used as an adjective before a noun. The noun is administration which we must define now. Administration too is given a number of meanings—

1. the act or process of administering
2. performance of executive duties; management
3. the execution of public affairs as distinguished from policy making
4. a body of persons who administer
5. a group constituting the political executive in a presidential government or a governmental agency or board
6. the term of office of an administrative

officer or body.

If any common element among these definitions is to be struck, it is getting things done—management, execution, implementation. Thus a convenient way of defining administration is to view it as a process through which something gets done.

Getting things done is an action with a purpose and in this sense administration may be viewed as equated with programmes. If administration is getting things done, then this process requires programmes—i.e. "plan or system under which action may be taken toward a goal" as suggested earlier. If, for example, one of the major purposes of an administration is to increase literacy rates in a community of illiterates this administration will require a number of programmes—such as compulsory primary education for a particular age-group, night schools for a different age-group, training of teachers, curricula development, establishment of libraries and laboratories and the like—to be worked out and implemented. Now we have defined the three terms—programmes, public and administration separately and now it remains to show the interconnection between and among these three terms.

To do so, a paradigm of public administration is developed below which will use the meaning of the terms indicated earlier. A public administration worth its name is by and with the people (public) getting things done with a purpose (administration) through plans of action (programmes). Admittedly, this is a highly oversimplified definition of a rather extremely complex phenomenon. It says so many things just as it leaves out so many other things. For example it does not say anything about the political framework within which any public administration must operate. We have taken it for granted as a given—understood or accepted. This given, understood or accepted phenomenon is government—the political framework. Government determines the broad policy for public administration to follow. It also determines the "its" and "but's" and "yes" and "nos" and "uncertains" by delimiting the areas of operation and policy alternatives of public administration. It also tells which programmes are to be initiated and spells out the philosophical or political creed to which the public administration must defer in terms of commitment.

It will appear now that by government we are meaning fully established political leadership in a country which draws its origin, office and authority from the people. Thus public administration which is defined as the people getting things done through programmes must be a part and parcel of government. The government acts through public administration, and public

administration is, so to speak, the cutting-edge of the government. Nearly all, if not all, activities of the government are within the purview of public administration. By developing plans for action in various fields (programmes), the people or their representatives duly authorized to act on behalf of the people (public) get things done to active the purpose they choose (administration). Here we must see the interrelationships between and among the three phenomena—public, government and administration.

Thus our suggested paradigm of public administration would look like this:

1. Public
2. Government
3. Administration
4. Programmes
5. Accountability

The basic elements in this model are:

1. Public—The people, voters, taxpayers, the common men.
2. Government — Political leadership exercising authority of the public or their representatives.
3. Administrator—Bureaucrats, rules and procedures
4. Programmes—The plans for action
5. Accountability—Answerability of both the public and the bureaucrats for all programmes.

This model assumes the following: (1) The people are the prologue—the starting point. They are the source of all authority to be exercised either directly by them or through their representatives duly authorized to exercise authority on their behalf. All human artifacts such as government, public administration, programme—must draw their authority to get things done from the people.

(2) Government is the authority of the people epitomized, legitimized and institutionalized. Thus, a government has authority from the people to operate. Government therefore determines the way it wants its public administration to go.

(3) Administration is getting things done. True, but getting things done requires bureaucracy (the most rational organization human beings ever developed for group effort that emphasizes technical competence or expertise). Bureaucracy means technical competence via hierarchy, specialization, rules, impersonality (a la Max Weber). We have not developed or sophisticated social organization to achieve anything large-scale except through bureaucracy. Thus any administration would involve bureaucracy big or small. Bureaucracy is perhaps the only method which maximizes rationality in decision making.

(4) Plans for action take the form of programmes. Programmes perform the following to needs—given constraints and commitments. Programmes reform the following

(Continued on page 6)

Public Administration

(Continued from page 5)

functions for public administration. Programmes (a) seek to solve the problems of, and respond to the demands of the public (b) provide a basis for expending funds duly appropriated or sanctioned (c) serve as a monitoring device for control and coordination of diverse efforts.

(5) As programmes affect for good or worse the life and well-being of the public, the persons and offices implementing programmes must remain answerable to the public through appropriate institutional devices. In other words public administration as such is accountable to the public or their representatives duly authorized by the public. The mechanism through which such accountability can be ensured must be institutionalized. One way to do so is to permit the public to perform "review and criticism" of programmes "at all time". This can be done by associating the public with the programmes from the very beginning and at all later stages of programmes, the public can be invited to review and criticize aspects of plans. This process will enable the public to comprehend the technical aspects of programmes and the bureaucrats will gain an additional insight into the public aspects of any programme. The public being a part and parcel of the programme right from the beginning must accept a major part of administrative accountability. The bureaucrats part of the accountability is diluted and shared with the public and both the public and the bureaucrat are mutually rewarded in the process of programme implementation.

Administrative accountability would cease to be an one-way traffic of making the bureaucrat responsible for all programmes in a spirit of confrontation. It would be a two-way traffic with both the public and the bureaucrats sharing responsibility for all programmes. The one-way system is unsatisfactory as accountability comes after the action has already been taken. Concurrent and continuous accountability in a spirit of mutual understanding and reciprocity can be built into the public administration by the two-way system suggested.

Thus the above model makes or seeks to make public administration what it really ought to be: the public and administration acting together by sharing authority and responsibility for all programmes at all times.